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### McDonaldization

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# **McDonaldization: An American menace to the Dutch labor market? Research Report**

**A.J. Steijn and M.C. de Witte<sup>1</sup>**

SOM theme: Structure, Control and Organization of Primary Processes

## **Abstract**

In this paper the empirical validity of Ritzer's 'McDonaldization' thesis is tested for the Dutch labor market. A questionnaire was submitted to a representative panel of 1022 respondents in paid employment. The workers most likely to be confronted with a high degree of 'McDonaldization' are women, relatively young, employed in consumer services, retail sales, communications/utilities /transport, and manufacturing. They work with materials or machines, hold a non-supervisory position and work without any automated devices. Hence, 'McDonaldization' is related to work-associated attitudes. Our conclusion is that the higher the degree of 'McDonaldization', the more workers are dissatisfied with their jobs and the stronger their feelings of underutilization. The most important result established is the non-existence of an overall 'McDonaldization' trend: 40% of all jobs are certainly not 'McDonaldized'. However, for the Dutch labor market the threatening American menace of McDonaldization is certainly present.

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## 1. Introduction

In his thought-provoking book 'The McDonaldization of Society' Ritzer describes a new model for the ongoing process of rationalization in modern society. McDonaldization is defined as *'the process by which the principles of the fast-food restaurant are coming to dominate more and more sectors of American society as well as the rest of the world'* (1993a: 1). Of course this process is not without its historical roots. It is possible to point to important precursors like the bureaucracy, scientific management and the assembly line.

In the context of this paper Ritzer's remarks on McDonaldization and its effect on the quality of labor are intriguing. That is why the latter two predecessors are relevant. When describing them, Ritzer makes it very clear that both ways of organizing labor have downgrading effects on the quality of labor. Scientific management (Taylorism) and the assembly line both lead to robot-like, highly specialized and unskilled workers doing highly predictable and efficient tasks. Both systems permit the quantification of many elements in the production process and permit maximum control over workers. In the words of Ritzer: *'It is clearly a dehumanizing setting in which to work .... Instead of expressing their human abilities on the job, people are forced to deny their humanity and act in a robot-like manner'* (1993a: 26).

McDonaldization can be seen as *'the culmination of a series of rationalization processes that had been occurring throughout the twentieth century'* (1993a: 31). Ritzer lists numerous examples which illustrate that McDonalds invented little that was new. McDonaldization, of course, is a process that manifests itself in nearly all segments of society. In this paper we are particularly interested in 'the McDonaldization of work'. Of course, this is only a part of this overall process. Ritzer's view of this 'McDonaldization of work' can, however, be reconstructed from several remarks in his study.

Ritzer distinguishes four dimensions of McDonaldization: efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control. Within this last dimension especially, questions concerning (the quality of) work play a role. The first thing which becomes clear is that control by nonhuman technologies is replacing human labor. Work traditionally done by workers has been taken over by machines such

as automatic drink dispensers, the automatic french fries machine, supermarket scanners and preprogrammed cash registers, soups that cook themselves, etc. One of the effects of this is that employment is decreasing. The future will bring an increasing number of nonhuman technologies with similar effects.

Not only is employment decreasing, according to Ritzer the same is true for the quality of work. In essence McDonaldization means taking skills away from people. A fast-food restaurant is a dehumanizing work setting: few skills are required. Ritzer agrees with Burger King workers who state '*A moron could learn the job, it's so easy*' (1993a: 131). The complexity of the tasks is almost reduced to zero. Workers are not allowed to think and to be creative on the job. Furthermore, because of the routinization and standardization which accompanies McDonaldization, autonomy within the job is diminishing too. The idea is to maximize control by giving workers limited tasks and prescribe exactly the way in which they should be executed. '*Thus workers are asked to use only a minute proportion of all of their skills and abilities*' (1993a: 131). According to Ritzer this is not only irrational from the point of view of the organization, it is also irrational from the perspective of the employee. Among those who work in fast-food restaurants it causes a high level of resentment, job dissatisfaction, alienation, absenteeism, and turnover (1993a: 132).<sup>2</sup>

The aim of this paper is to explore the empirical validity of the McDonaldization thesis with respect to its expectations for the (future) quality of work. Hence, we will investigate whether 'McDonaldization of work' exists. It is important to note the fact that we are using data gathered in The Netherlands.

McDonaldization is, of course, primarily an American phenomenon, so Ritzer's ideas certainly need an empirical test using American data. According to its

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<sup>2</sup> In an interesting micro-sociological analysis Leidner argues that by scripting social interactions service employers shape the self-conceptions and self-presentations of their workers. By doing so the service recipients are subjected to organizational practices aimed at standardizing their behavior. '*Scripted service routines can be clever or ludicrous, clumsy or effective, but it is hard to escape the uncomfortable sensation that they threaten participants' dignity and promote a reductive view of human relations*' (1993: 216).

definition McDonaldization has a worldwide character. McDonaldization, with its accent on formal rationality, is related to the process of modernization. So we would also expect signs of it to be present in a highly modernized country like The Netherlands. Preliminary indications are the increasing presence of national and international chains (e.g. C&A, Hij, Zij, 't Kruidvat, Douglas, McDonalds, Burger King, Pizza Hut, The Body Shop, Footlocker) in our shopping streets and malls.<sup>3</sup> The credibility of the McDonaldization thesis, specifically its universal claims, increases if it proves to stand up to Dutch empirical evidence. This is why it is worthwhile to study the McDonaldization of work in the Dutch case. In this paper we will analyze two *research questions*:

1. *To what extent, and in which work settings, does McDonaldization exist in The Netherlands?*
2. *What are the consequences of McDonaldization for the work-related attitudes of our respondents?*

The composition of this paper is as follows. Section 2 summarizes the literature on the relationship between technological changes and the quality of work. Adler's distinction is used to illustrate four research generations within this scientific field. Subsequently, Ritzer's remarks on McDonaldization and its effects on the quality of work are related to Adler's analysis. After the conceptualization of job content as a two-dimensional concept, we will describe our data and operationalization in section 3. Hence, two types of analyses are presented. In this way both research questions are answered (sections 4 and 5). Finally, section 6 summarizes our results and formulates some conclusions and a pair of alternative interpretations.

## **2. Research on automation and work**

The relationship between technological development and the quality of labor has been widely studied. Some of these studies sketch the beneficial effects of the

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<sup>3</sup> We agree in this respect with Ritzer's observations as expressed in the foreword of his *Burgerzaallezing* in Rotterdam, The Netherlands (1993b).

introduction of new technology<sup>4</sup>: they describe an upgrading effect of skills. Technological development is believed to result in a regradation of working life and the disappearance of alienating labor. In contrast to these optimistic studies there are other, more pessimistic, analyses which put forward the downgrading thesis. These state that the introduction of new technology will be followed by a redesign of job content in such a way that the conception of work will become separated from the actual performance of the job. In the future more workers will be engaged in downgraded work.

Adler distinguishes three different generations in this research stream and describes an emerging fourth generation. The first generation, in the 1950s and 1960s, saw automation leading to an upgrading of skills, '*relative to the limited jobs requirements of the assembly line*' (1992: 6). This trend is also known as the regradation thesis. More specifically, this upgrading position is related to the industrialization thesis and neoclassical economics (Kerr et al. 1960, 1983). According to authors belonging to this generation, an effect of the inherent characteristics of new technologies is that the quality of working life will increase and alienating labor will disappear (Woodward 1958, Blauner 1964, Bell 1976). Generally, in their analyses these authors use a technological deterministic perspective, i.e., they assume that the development of production techniques is the most important factor determining the content of jobs and the ways in which labor is structured and organized.

In this view industrialization, and the associated technological changes, requires a broader variety of skills and a higher average skill level from the work force. Simultaneously, automation and other technological changes eliminate machine-paced, boring and routine work. Both the workers' control over the immediate work environment, and their overview of the production process, increases. There is less close supervision and a larger degree of autonomy and responsibility for the workers. Vallas summarizes this as follows: '*Reduced to its essentials, then, the upgrading perspective predicts that*

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<sup>4</sup> The concept of 'new technology' is used here in the sense of automation processes made possible by information technology.

*workplace automation increases both work autonomy and complexity, thereby reducing alienation from work as well'* (Vallas 1990: 381).

The research conducted in the 1970s was less optimistic and was inspired by the (neo)Marxist tradition. Various studies concluded that the potentially positive effect of technology on skill requirements was often not realized. Instead of upgrading, progressive automation was thought to have a degrading effect on job requirements. Braverman's provocative study '*Labor and Monopoly Capital. The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century*' (1974) is a perfect example of studies belonging to this generation. Other relevant authors in this respect are Beynon and Nichols (1977), Buroway (1985), Greenbaum (1979), Kern and Schumann (1972), and Marglin (1971).

Within their case studies these authors paid a lot of attention to the power relations within a firm. In their eyes the problem of management is a problem of control. Technological change, the reorganization of work (separation of planning, conception and the execution of tasks) and deskilling of jobs serve to control labor. '*The net result is a polarized labor force and occupational structure: a growing mass of unskilled and semiskilled jobs and workers at the bottom and managers and professionals at the top*' (Spencer 1985: 127).

The central thesis for this generation of research can be read as follows: '*capitalist societies tend to de-skill work in their constant search for lower production costs and greater control over a potentially recalcitrant labor force*' (Adler, 1992: 7). The main research results showed cases of underutilization, instances in which profitability seemed to call for deskilling and instances showing that managerial ideologies cause deskilling at the expense of efficiency.

The third generation of research, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, avoids broad trends and generalizations like up- or downgrading. With respect to this stream of research Adler uses the term 'contextualist' generation. Fine examples can be found in the work of Edwards (1979), Gallie (1978), Maurice, Sorge and Warner (1980), and Wentink and Zanders (1985). The dominant image in this (mostly case study) research is the impossibility of formulating valid generalizations concerning long-run trends in skills. The 'contextualists' generated research into factors such as the balance of political power, union

organization, market conditions, and the like, which could override any direct effect technology might have on skills. *'The dominant image of the future of work in this research is that of a kaleidoscope of complex patterns, constantly shifting and forming no overall tendency'* (Adler 1992: 8).

Since the second half of the 1980s the contextualist line of research has become less popular. Adler cautiously points to a fourth generation of studies, in which data on aggregate skill levels and case studies are increasingly interpreted as evidence against downgrading, and at the same time as evidence for a net upgrading trend. Examples can be found in the work of Spenner (1985), Kern and Schumann (1984), Piore and Sable (1984), and Huijgen (1989).

Within the fourth generation, authors are sensitive to the variations across national and organizational contexts and the influence of intervening variables. This sensitivity is, of course, related to the research results stemming from the third generation. Furthermore, it is recognized that the upgrading tendencies will manifest themselves in a more or less chaotic pattern, *'often leaving pockets of deskilling...'* (Adler 1992: 8). Central is the idea that competition forces firms to design more productive combinations of machine and human capacities. In this context Kern and Schumann (1984) point to *'a paradigm shift'* in the production concepts used by managers, which is related to the body of thought called Human Resources Management. *'In this process the outcome is, more often than not, an upgrading of skill requirements. Firms, regions and countries that ignore this relationship suffer a critical competitive handicap'* (Adler 1992: 8).

In relation to Adler's four generations of research, Ritzer's remarks on McDonaldization and its effects on the quality of labor are intriguing. There is a striking similarity between Ritzer's thesis and the aforementioned ideas of Braverman. In his detailed analysis of manual work Braverman (1974), an American Marxist, states that within capitalist societies the labor process is increasingly rationalized. Skills, initiative, and control are steadily removed from work by mechanized and automated production. Tasks are divided between conception and execution, are split into simple operations and are organized and



directed from above. More and more coordination from management is required and the workers are losing control of the work. *'The net results of these changes are a de-skilling of the labour force, a reduction of its control over the work process and in particular, a cheapening of labour power'* (Haralambos 1980: 81).

Because of the striking similarities between Ritzer and Braverman, it is clear that the McDonaldization thesis (anno 1993) relates to the second research generation distinguished by Adler (see also section 1). It is important to note in this context that in a discussion about the characteristics of post-Fordism, Ritzer argues that there has been no clear historical break with Fordism. Although certain elements of post-Fordism are present in the modern world, e.g. technology developments which make flexible production possible, economic changes developing sellers markets into buyers markets (Hammer and Champy 1994), it is clear that Fordism persists and is not dead yet. *'McDonaldism shares many characteristics with Fordism, notably homogeneous products, rigid technologies, standardized work routines, deskilling, homogenization of labor (and customer), the mass worker, and homogenization of consumption... Fordism is alive and well in the modern world, although it has been transformed into McDonaldism'* (Ritzer 1993a: 155).

This illustrates that Ritzer is much more pessimistic about the future quality of work than the fourth generation of researchers distinguished by Adler. Instead of net upgrading Ritzer expects McDonaldization to lead to deskilling. Following Ritzer one can argue that the McDonaldization of work implies that the degree of complexity and autonomy within the job content will decrease. This is an interesting contradiction which calls for further empirical research.

### **3. Data and operationalization**

To answer our research questions we analyzed data gathered in November 1994. We submitted a questionnaire to a panel of 1022 respondents. This panel consists of people with a personal computer at their disposal from the 'Stichting Telepanel'. In return for the use of this computer, these people have to answer a weekly questionnaire. Researchers use this facility to get reliable data in a quick

and efficient way.<sup>5</sup> According to the organizers of the telepanel it is representative for the total Dutch population<sup>6</sup>.

In the questionnaire we only asked questions of panel members in paid employment. The questions asked were related to the content of their jobs, the effects of automation on job content, and the respondents' attitudes towards their jobs (e.g. job satisfaction, career possibilities, feelings of underutilization). Of the 1022 interviewed respondents, 654 were male and 368 were female. The mean age was 39.

Without going into too much detail, some comments on the concept 'job content' are called for. A vast amount of literature exists on the relationship between technological changes and the quality of work. As a rule the quality of work is differentiated into four dimensions: job content, conditions of employment, working conditions, and the employment relation (Mok 1990). We agree with those who state that job content is the most important aspect (Doorewaard 1989: 15). This is why we have concentrated our analysis on this aspect.

The conceptualization of job content and skills is problematic. Spenner states (1983, 1985, 1988a, 1988b, 1992) that theoretical and quantitative studies suggest at least two fundamental organizing dimensions of skill: '*substantive complexity*' and '*autonomy-control*'. These dimensions are conceptually distinct though empirically positively correlated (rough estimates report correlations in the range of  $r = 0.5$  to  $0.7$ ).

We have followed Spenner's definitions and operationalization here. Substantive complexity refers to 'the level, scope and integration of mental, interpersonal, and manipulative tasks in a job' (1983: 829). The distinction between manipulative, interpersonal and mental tasks points to the classic

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<sup>5</sup> The existence of this Telepanel is of course an example of the McDonaldization of science that has taken place.

<sup>6</sup> This is not the same as claiming that the panel is representative for the Dutch *working* population.

distinction between jobs that have primarily to do with things, with people or with data.

In addition to complexity Spenner distinguishes ‘*autonomy-control*’ as the second dimension of skill. There is no consensus on the definition of autonomy, but we agree with his view that it refers to the degree of discretion available in a job to initiate and conclude action, to control the content, the manner and the speed with which a task is performed (1985: 829).

According to Spenner, the distinction between substantive complexity and autonomy-control is of the utmost importance because a research design which is limited to only one of these dimensions distorts the research results. In an overview article he concludes: *‘It is intriguing that there are more hints of downgrading in studies of skill as autonomy-control and more hints of upgrading in studies of skill as substantive complexity, suggesting the possibility of divergent aggregate trends in the two dimensions of skill. If valid, the resulting occupational structure is one of slowly increasing levels of complexity in jobs but slowly decreasing discretion and autonomy-control to deal with the more complicated work tasks’* (1985: 141). For future studies on changes in job content Spenner recommends the incorporation of both dimensions in the research design. In our analysis we follow this recommendation. Therefore, our dependent variable ‘McDonaldization of work’ is operationalized as follows.

#### *‘McDonaldization of work’*

Our survey data permit only a cross-sectional analysis at a specific point in time. This makes trend analysis impossible and pertinent statements with respect to McDonaldization *as a process* premature. We assume that comparing the content of jobs with regard to their degree of McDonaldization, nevertheless gives insight into this process.

Following Spenner, we believe that two variables in particular are very important with regard to the content of jobs: their degree of autonomy and

complexity. Following Ritzer, downgrading or ‘McDonaldization of work’<sup>7</sup> is operationalized as jobs characterized by low degrees of complexity and autonomy. We determined the autonomy and complexity of the jobs held by the respondents by constructing two scales. The scale for autonomy consists of nine items (such as ‘can you determine your own work pace’) with a Cronbach’s alpha of .78; the scale indicating the complexity consists of eleven items (such as ‘Does your job require constant intensive thought?’ or ‘Is it possible to do your job mainly by routine?’), with a Cronbach’s alpha of .74.

Firstly, we will report the degree of autonomy and complexity within our respondents jobs. This indicates the general quality of work for the Dutch labor market. Secondly, we will try to answer the question which jobs are especially ‘McDonaldized’. To find this out, we use a variable indicating the degree of ‘McDonaldization’ of the job content. This variable is measured by a summation of the standardized scores on the autonomy and complexity scale. A low score on this variable indicates working in a McDonaldized job. Of course, we are interested to know in which work settings jobs are McDonaldized. To describe this, we will use the following independent variables:

#### *Company size*

We expect the size of a company to influence the ‘McDonaldization of work’. Big companies have more possibilities for standardizing or routinizing the work processes and organization. So, we expect that the bigger the company, the more McDonaldized jobs will be present.

#### *Economic sector*

We expect that the degree of ‘McDonaldization’ in jobs is dependent upon the economic sector. To classify possible industries we follow the logic of Esping-Andersen (1993: 23), who divides the economy according to two broad logics. He distinguishes the traditional economy (characterized by a Fordistic system of

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<sup>7</sup> From now on in this paper we will use the terms ‘McDonaldization of work’ and ‘McDonaldization’ (indicating the dependent variable in our analysis) as synonyms.

standardized mass production and mass consumption) from the post-industrial service sector. Within the 'traditional economy' he discerns: 1) manufacturing; 2) wholesale; 3) communications, utilities & transportation; 4) retail sales. Within the post-industrial service sector he discerns: 5) government; 6) consumer services (hotel and catering industry, launderettes, travel agencies); 7) social services (education, health care) and 8) business services (banking, insurance, management consultancy). We coded the industries with the aid of a coding scheme provided for by Assimakopoulou et al (1993). One would, by definition, expect jobs in the traditional Fordist sector to be more McDonaldized. Within the post-industrial service economy, however, we suggest that the same will be true for the 'consumer services'. Ritzer's McDonaldization concept is, after all, derived from a company that delivers a special kind of consumer service, namely the hamburger.

#### *Type of work*

Associated with, but dissimilar to the above, is a variable that indicates the type of work people do. In our questionnaire respondents were asked to indicate whether they are primarily dealing with 1) materials (or machines); 2) information; or 3) people. Following Ritzer's examples we expect the 'McDonaldization' within jobs to be relatively high when people work with machines or, in Ritzer's terminology, with 'nonhuman technologies'. 'McDonaldization' will be less if people are dealing mostly with information and will be minimal when they are working primarily with people. This is because there are fewer possibilities for standardizing and routinizing human interaction.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> This question is difficult for a lot of respondents to answer, because in their work they combine working with materials, information and people. This is why we phrased the question in terms of 'dealing primarily with'. This seems to have been a good solution because no respondent failed to answer the question (n=1022). It remains a difficult question for workers in fast-food restaurants in particular. Are they primarily involved with materials or people?

### *Supervisory position.*

Almost by definition one would expect respondents with a supervisory position to work in a less McDonaldized job than workers doing executive tasks. This variable is operationalized by a question asking if respondents execute supervision of other workers. In the analysis we will discern two broad categories: 1) workers with a supervisory position (who answered this question with 'yes'); and 2) workers without such a position.

### *Degree of automation.*

As we have argued in section 2, Ritzer suggests a relationship between automation and McDonaldization; in the description of his fourth dimension, especially, it becomes clear that the basic idea is '*to gradually and progressively gain control over people through the development and employment of a wide variety of increasingly effective technologies*' (1993a: 100). In this paper we have operationalized the degree of automation with a variable consisting of three categories. The first category consists of workers who work without any kind of automated artifact. Workers in the second category work 50% or less of their working time with automated devices; workers in the third category work more than 50% of their working time with such devices.

### *Gender and age*

Following Ritzer<sup>9</sup>, and in accordance with the current debate on the flexibilization of labor relations, two other variables are important when one is trying to find out which workers have jobs which are McDonaldized: namely gender and age. One may expect women and younger workers to have a McDonaldized job more often than men and older employees.

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<sup>9</sup> Ritzer's statement about the high turnover rate in the fast-food industry is related to variables such as gender and age. High turnover rates combined with high labor costs result automatically (in The Netherlands anyway) in comparatively young personnel. Because of the existing high turnover rates, general prejudices about female workers getting pregnant and therefore leaving their jobs are less relevant. This is why we expect a relatively high number of women to find jobs within the fast-food industry.

Our second research question concerned the work related attitudes of our respondents. In this analysis we will examine two such attitudes: job satisfaction and feelings of underutilization.

#### *Job satisfaction.*

The degree of job satisfaction is measured by a set of eight items. These items form a scale (Cronbach's alpha = .73). The lower the score, the more satisfied the workers are. The scale consists of items such as 'Normally I enjoy to start my working day' or 'During the last few months, did you consider applying for a job elsewhere?'<sup>10</sup>. The mean score on this scale is 1.59 (st.dev. 1.82), well below the theoretical mean of 4. This means that our respondents are relatively satisfied with their jobs.

#### *Underutilization.*

This concept is measured by a one-item question. We asked our respondents whether they can use their skills and potentials in their job. They could answer with 1) 'always'; 2) 'often'; 3) 'sometimes'; or 4) 'never'. Most respondents chose the category often (463), followed by the categories 'always' (342), sometimes (196) and never (21). Given these results, most workers do not feel underutilized. However, we will investigate if the occurrence of these feelings are related to the variables discussed above. In this analysis we - possibly controversially - will treat this variable as an interval-variable. Hereby applies: the higher the score on this variable, the higher the feelings of underutilization.

### **4. The 'McDonaldization of work' (analysis 1)**

To begin with we analyzed the general degree of autonomy and complexity of the job content. As has been said above, both variables are measured by a set of items forming a scale. Table 1 presents the mean scale scores and the standard deviation of both scales. A high score indicates a high degree of autonomy or complexity.

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<sup>10</sup> 'Yes' or 'no' were the two possible answers to these questions.

**Table 1. Mean scale scores and standard deviation for autonomy and complexity**

	Mean	St.dev	Minimal score	Maximal score
<i>Autonomy</i>	6.682	2.304	0	9
<i>Complexity</i>	6.941	2.519	0	11

n=1022

In the next table, the relationship between autonomy and complexity is investigated. In this table 'low' and 'high' complexity or autonomy are determined by the standardized 'z-scores'. If the z-score is lower than '0', we can speak of low autonomy or complexity; if this score is equal to or higher than '0', we can speak of high autonomy or complexity.

**Table 2 Combinations of low and high scores for autonomy and complexity (in %)**

<b>Combination</b>		
low autonomy /	low complexity	14%
high autonomy /	low complexity	23%
low autonomy /	high complexity	23%
high autonomy /	high complexity	40%

n=1022

Overall, the quality of jobs in the Dutch labor market seems to be very reasonable. No less than 40% of our respondents hold a job characterized by



high autonomy and high complexity. In contrast, only 14% of the respondents occupy a ‘McDonaldized’ job (simultaneously low autonomy and low complexity). The other 46% of our respondents scored between these extremes.<sup>11</sup> Given our results, an overall ‘McDonaldization of work’ does not exist. At best the ‘McDonaldization of work’ is a process that only affects some workers, working in special settings. In the following paragraph we will analyze which variables are related to the ‘McDonaldization of work’.

First, we will analyze the relationship between the ‘McDonaldization of work’ and the type of industry the respondents are working in. The number of respondents per industry are given between brackets.

**Table 3 Scores for ‘McDonaldization’, by economic sector**

manufacturing	(n=157)	-.08
wholesale	(n=49)	.36
commun./utilities/transport	(n=130)	-.30
retail sales	(n=66)	-.48
government	(n=106)	.63
consumer services	(n=47)	-.52
social services	(n=301)	.11
business services	(n=138)	.12

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n= 994 (excl. resp. in agricultural sector)	eta = .22	p < .0001
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According to table 3, there is a rather strong relationship between the economic sector and ‘McDonaldization’. As expected, the overall ‘McDonaldization’ is stronger in the traditional Fordist industries than in the post-industrial service

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<sup>11</sup> With respect to our internal differentiation hypothesis the combination of high complexity and low autonomy (23%) is particularly interesting (Steijn and De Witte 1992, 1994).

industries. Notable exceptions are - for the Fordist industries - wholesale, and for the post-industrial sector (as expected and in accordance with the McDonaldization thesis) consumer services. This latter industry scores the highest degree of 'McDonaldization'. Respondents working in the government sector (e.g. civil servants in government departments or in the judicial structure) score the lowest degree of 'McDonaldization'.

**Table 4 Scores for 'McDonaldization', by type of work**

materials or machines	(n=218)	-.54
information	(n=290)	.26
people	(n=514)	.08

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n= 1022	eta = .20	p < .0001
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According to table 4, respondents working with materials or with machines give evidence of a high degree of 'McDonaldization'. Respondents working with information show the lowest degree of 'McDonaldization'. The respondents primarily working with people score between these extremes.

**Table 5 Scores for 'McDonaldization', by hierarchical position**

non-supervisory position	(n=722)	-.25
supervisory position	(n=300)	.60

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n= 1022	eta = .27	p < .0001
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As expected, the job content of respondents in non-supervisory positions is much more McDonaldized than that of respondents with a supervisory position.

**Table 6 Scores for ‘McDonaldization’, by size of company**

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less than 11 workers	(n=93)	-.21
between 11 and 100 workers	(n=302)	-.02
between 101 and 500 workers	(n=235)	.07
more than 500 workers	(n=358)	.09

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n= 988	eta = .06	p > .25
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Contrary to our expectations, there appears to be no relationship between the degree of ‘McDonaldization’ and the size of the company.

**Table 7 Scores for ‘McDonaldization’, by degree of automation**

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not automated	(n=327)	-.53
50% or < of working time automated	(n=438)	.31
more than 50% automated	(n=255)	.15

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n= 1020	eta = .26	p < .001
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The results in table 7 are surprising. Although the relationship between ‘McDonaldization’ and the degree of automation is significant, the direction of this relationship is contrary to our expectations. It appears that workers who are not affected by automated devices hold jobs which are more McDonaldized than workers who are working with these devices. However, it appears that workers who are only working with these devices ‘part-time’ are comparatively in the best situation.

**Table 8 Scores for ‘McDonaldization’, by gender**

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men	(n=654)	.23
women	(n=368)	-.40

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n= 1022	eta = .21	p < .0001
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Table 8 confirms our expectations. Women’s jobs appear to be much more McDonaldized than those of men.

**Table 9 Scores for ‘McDonaldization’, by age**

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15 - 24 years	(n=51)	-.56
25 - 34 years	(n=354)	-.11
35 - 44 years	(n=329)	.14
45 - 54 years	(n=220)	.06
55 - 64 years	(n=65)	.16

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n= 1019	eta = .11	p < .01
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Table 9 confirms yet another expectation. Younger workers are working in jobs with a higher degree of ‘McDonaldization’ than older workers. The relationship even looks linear: the older the respondents, the less likely they are to be working in McDonaldized jobs. Although the association is not very high, it appears that the labor position of the youngest workers in particular is the least enviable.

Summarizing the above, we can conclude (based on bivariate analysis) that respondents confronted with high degrees of ‘McDonaldization’ are female,

relatively young and working: 1) in consumer services, retail sales, communications /utilities/transport, and manufacturing; 2) with materials or with machines; 3) in a non-supervisory position; 4) without any automated devices. In the following analysis, we will investigate whether this relationships will persist in a multivariate (ANCOVA-)design. In this analysis economic sector, type of work and the degree of automation are treated as categorical variables, while supervisory position, company size, gender, and age are treated as covariates.

**Table 10 Multivariate analysis of scores for ‘McDonaldization’**

Source of Variation	raw regression		Signif. of F
	coefficients	F	
<b>Covariates</b>		27.307	.000
age	.021	.956	.329
gender	-.432	24.041	.000
company size	-.001	.001	.974
supervision	.680	53.511	.000
<b>Main Effects</b>	eta*	beta**	
sector	.22	.21	6.334
type of work	.17	.12	6.187
degree of autom.	.25	.15	10.423
<b>2-way Interactions</b>			
sector, type of work		1.427	.060
sector, degree of automation		1.764	.040
type of work, degree of automation		1.265	.223
<b>3-way Interactions</b>			
sector, type of work, degree of autom.		.803	.523
<b>Explained</b>		1.651	.028
		1.651	.028
		4.413	.000

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n=957       $R^2=.19$

\* eta is the association before control;

\*\* beta is the association after control for all other main effects and covariates.

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The results of the multivariate analysis, presented in table 10, are interesting. In

the first place, it is relevant to note that nearly all bivariate effects still have a significant effect on 'McDonaldization' when controlled for by the other variables. Age is the only exception: its effect disappears when it is controlled for other variables. So our aforementioned conclusion still persists, 'McDonaldization' is stronger when: the respondent is female; is in a non-supervisory position; working in some specific sectors of the economy; working with materials or machines; and working without automated devices. These effects occur more or less independently of each other. In total these variables explain 19% of the variance of our dependent variable. This is satisfactory, although not very high.

Interestingly enough, table 10 also illustrates that one two-way and one three-way interaction effect of the categorical variables have a significant effect on 'McDonaldization'. In appendix I, the scores for 'McDonaldization' in each of the separate combined variable categories are presented. These kinds of interaction effects are difficult to interpret. However, the significance of the two-way interaction effect of sector and type of work is evidence that the precise effects of the type of work are different for the various economic sectors.

For instance, it is important to note there is an exception to the rule that respondents who primarily work with people 'normally' hold a relatively less McDonaldized job. This particularly does not apply to workers in sectors such as consumer services, retail sales and communications/utilities/transport. In these sectors respondents working primarily with people perform in a relatively highly McDonaldized job, sometimes even more McDonaldized than workers in the same industries working primarily with materials/machines or with information. In contrast, for respondents working in the government sector the degree of 'McDonaldization' is rather low - whether they work primarily with materials/machines, with information or with people. The same is true for respondents working primarily with people in manufacturing, wholesale and business services.

This leads to the conclusion that primarily working with people is no guarantee per se against 'McDonaldization'. It is probably the case that in sectors where workers participate in highly standardized interactions (e.g. a

waitress in consumer services, a shop assistant in retail sales and a bus driver in the transportation sector) the degree of ‘McDonaldization’ is comparatively high. The job content of respondents working primarily with people in less standardized interaction situations (e.g. a policymaker in a government department or an account manager at a bank) is relatively untouched by ‘McDonaldization’ (see also Leidner 1993).

It may be possible to develop a comparable argument for the significance of the three-way interaction effect. At first sight, however, the figures in appendix 2 appear confusing. To make a better interpretation possible further elaboration is necessary. Such an elaboration is impossible with the present data because of the small number of respondents. To better understand this kind of interaction effect we need to know more about the work settings, or work contexts in which they occur. In addition to further quantitative analysis, it would be advisable to achieve a deeper insight into these (interaction) effects by means of strategically selected and systematically executed case studies.

## **5. ‘McDonaldization’ and work-related attitudes (analysis 2)**

The second research question concerns the effect of ‘McDonaldization’ on work-related attitudes such as job satisfaction and the perception of underutilization. As has been said before, we have hypothesized that the more people work in ‘McDonaldized’ jobs, the less satisfied they are with their jobs and the more they experience feelings of underutilization. We will first examine job satisfaction. Table 11 presents the results of an ANCOVA-analysis.



**Table 11 Multivariate analysis of job satisfaction**

Source of Variation	raw regression		Signif of F
	coefficients	F	
<b>Covariates</b>		17.107	.000
McDonaldization	-.202	22.780	.000
age	-.205	48.244	.000
gender	-.177	2.036	.154
company size	-.034	1.578	.209
supervision	-.083	53.511	.000
<b>Main Effects</b>	eta	beta*	
sector	.12	.11	1.863
type of work	.11	.10	1.542
degree of automation	.02	.04	3.642
<b>2-way Interactions</b>			
sector, type of work		0.991	.483
sector, degree of automation		1.276	.216
type of work, degree of automation		1.023	.428
<b>3-way Interactions</b>			
sector, type of work, degree of autom.		1.148	.333
<b>3-way Interactions</b>			
sector, type of work, degree of autom.		0.723	.825
sector, type of work, degree of autom.		0.723	.825
Explained		2.174	.000
<hr/>			
n=957	R <sup>2</sup> =.10		

Although the total effects are small, table 11 confirms our expectations. The effect of ‘McDonaldization’ on job satisfaction is highly significant. As

expected, the more McDonaldized the job, the less satisfied the workers are. There are, however, also some other significant effects. Older workers and workers without a supervisory position are also less satisfied with their work. This effect persists independently of 'McDonaldization', which means that - as having a non-supervisory position is associated with more 'McDonaldization' - 'McDonaldization' indirectly strengthens the effect of having a supervisory position.

There is also a significant effect from the type of work the respondent is doing: respondents working with people are more satisfied with their jobs than respondents primarily working with materials/machines or with information. Again, 'McDonaldization' indirectly strengthens this effect, since working with people is associated with less 'McDonaldization'. Interestingly enough, there is no direct effect of gender on job satisfaction, which means that gender has only an indirect effect (as female workers hold jobs with a relatively high degree of McDonaldization).

Table 12 presents the results of the multivariate analysis of feelings of underutilization.

**Table 12 Multivariate analysis of feelings of underutilization**

Source of Variation	raw regression		Signif of F
	coefficients	F	
<b>Covariates</b>		27.101	.000
McDonaldization	-.160	90.001	.000
age	-.067	32.280	.000
gender	-.108	2.036	.030
company size	.025	5.213	.023
supervision	.051	0.926	.336
<b>Main Effects</b>	eta	beta*	
sector	.18	.11	1.672
type of work	.15	.09	2.833
degree of automation	.11	.08	2.976
2-way Interactions		1.227	.141
sector, type of work		0.669	.806
sector, degree of automation		1.753	.041
type of work, degree of automation		.717	.581
3-way Interactions		1.504	.060
sector, type of work, degree of autom.		1.504	.060
Explained		3.570	.000
<hr/>			
n=957	R <sup>2</sup> =.16		

The effect of 'McDonaldization' is relatively strong: the higher the degree of McDonaldization the stronger the feelings of underutilization are. This again

confirms our (and Ritzer's) hypothesis. Furthermore, there are significant effects from three other covariates: age, gender and company size. This implies that older workers, females and workers in bigger companies feel themselves to be more underutilized than younger workers, men and workers in smaller companies. As far as age and gender are concerned, 'McDonaldization' has therefore also an indirect effect on these feelings of underutilization.

The main effects of the three categorical variables are not significant. This implies that 'McDonaldization' operates for these variables as an intermediary variable. As far as working in some specific sectors of the economy, working with materials/machines and working without automated devices are associated with more 'McDonaldization', 'McDonaldization' 'mediates' the effects of the work setting on feelings of underutilization.

Our overall conclusion for this section is that 'McDonaldization' is - as hypothesized - associated with work-related attitudes such as job satisfaction and feelings of underutilization. In both cases it operates as a mediating factor for more 'objective' conditions that are associated with the occurrence of 'McDonaldization' itself.

## **6. Conclusion and discussion**

We would like to end finish this paper by answering our two research questions. With respect to our first question the results indicate that, overall, the quality of jobs on the Dutch labor market seems to be very reasonable. Following Ritzer, one would expect that the majority of current jobs are McDonaldized. However, no less than 40% of our respondents hold a qualitatively high-level job. In contrast, only 14% of the respondents occupy a 'McDonaldized' job (characterized by a low degree of autonomy and complexity). The other 46% of our respondents score between these extremes.

Given these results an overall 'McDonaldization of work' does not exist. According to our bivariate analysis, the workers most likely to be confronted with high degrees of 'McDonaldization' are female, relatively young and working in consumer services, retail sales, communications/utilities/transport, and manufacturing, are working with materials or machines, hold a non-supervisory

position, and work without any automated devices. In the multivariate analysis, which explains 19% of the variance in 'McDonaldization' as the dependent variable, the aforementioned relations persist in playing a significant role.

With respect to our second research question, we can conclude that 'McDonaldization' is related to work-associated attitudes such as job satisfaction and feelings of underutilization. The higher the degree of 'McDonaldization', the more workers are dissatisfied with their job and the stronger their feelings of underutilization are. In both analyses, with job satisfaction and feelings of underutilization respectively as dependent variables, 'McDonaldization' operates as a mediating factor for more 'objective' conditions that are associated with the occurrence of 'McDonaldization' itself.

We have seen in section 2 that Ritzer is much more pessimistic about the future quality of work than authors belonging to the fourth research generation distinguished by Adler. Our survey data permit only a cross-sectional analysis at a specific point in time (November 1994). This makes trend analysis impossible and pertinent statements with respect to McDonaldization *as a process* premature. Two interpretations are possible.

Firstly, our results can be interpreted as empirical evidence underlining the main conclusion of the fourth research generation distinguished by Adler: net upgrading of the quality of labor leaving pockets of deskilling. In The Netherlands, pockets like this are found in the employment structure within economic sectors such as consumer services, retail sales, communications /utilities/transport, and manufacturing. McDonaldization is, of course, primarily an American phenomenon but the results of the Dutch case can be secondly interpreted as empirical evidence for Ritzer's McDonaldization thesis, especially when our findings are combined with an expected increase in employment in the service sector, specifically in consumer services. Such a development has already partly been taking place in The Netherlands since the second half of the Eighties. With good reason, certain observers of employment developments treat the Dutch job machine in terms of a hamburger economy.

Recently, a lot of policy energy in The Netherlands has been invested in creating jobs at the lower levels of the employment structure. This is especially

because the vast majority of structural unemployment is located at these levels. Almost by definition these kind of jobs represent a high degree of 'McDonaldization'. Together with the simultaneous flexibilization of labor relations, an ongoing process of McDonaldization is certainly not unlikely. So, for The Netherlands, too, there is reason enough to fear the American menace of McDonaldization.

As long as longitudinal research data are not available, a definite statement in favor of one or both interpretations is premature. Future research of this kind is of great importance. In this sense, we hope that this paper will be the first stage in a longer- running research program.

## Appendix

### I Two-way interaction effects of economic sector and type of work on scores for 'McDonaldization'

Economic Sector	Type of work		
	materials/machines	information	people
manufacturing	-0.59	0.34	0.66
wholesale	-1.01	0.82	0.63
comm./utilities./transp.	0.17	-0.24	-0.56
retail sales	-0.37	-0.20	-0.53
government	0.98	0.60	0.64
consumer services	-0.50	-0.48	-0.40
social services	0.34	0.49	0.10
business services	-1.04	0.13	0.34

### II Three-way interaction effect of economic sector, type of work and degree of automation on scores for 'McDonaldization'

Econ. Sector	Type of work								
	mat./machines			information			people		
	NA	A	SA	NA	A	SA	NA	A	SA
manuf.	-0.80	-0.86	-0.06	-0.99	0.51	0.24	0.92	0.55	0.67
wholesale	-2.28	-1.06	1.82	-----	0.81	0.83	1.01	0.83	0.05
comm./trans	-0.31	0.27	0.00	-1.50	0.36	-0.21	-1.14	0.23	-1.2
ret. sales	-0.72	0.65	-----	-----	-3.27	0.57	-0.89	-0.12	-0.80
government	-----	0.80	1.82	-----	0.59	0.61	0.28	0.73	0.58
con. serv.	-0.44	0.56	-1.03	-1.29	-0.19	-0.64	-1.53	0.41	1.19
soc. serv.	-0.05	-0.47	0.15	2.02	0.46	0.31	-0.22	0.37	0.47
bus. serv.	-1.88	0.72	-0.73	-0.41	0.28	0.10	-1.02	0.73	-0.15

NA = not automated; A = automated (<= 50% working time); SA = strongly automated (> 50% working time)

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